

Pittstown Tour

22 October 2016

A joint tour for the members of the Dutch Barn Preservation Society (DBPS) and the Society for the Preservation of Hudson Valley Vernacular Architecture (HVVA). Tour starts at 11AM, from 59 Sherman Lane: <http://nipmoosebarns.org/directions-nipmoose-farm/>

Of the five sites we will visit today, three have single aisle New World Dutch barns on them. Typical New World Dutch barns feature a broad center aisle, with flanking, narrow, side aisles. The center aisle was historically used for threshing grain, and for storage of equipment. The side aisles housed animals, with lofts overhead being used for additional grain and tool storage. Single aisle barns are uncommon in most of the New World Dutch cultural hearth, and are entirely unknown in many areas. Why would there be a concentration of this building type in Pittstown?

Traditional Hudson Valley farming practices began changing during the 18th century, in part due to changes in the cultural landscape; this process accelerated after the end of the Revolution when New Englanders flooded into New York, bringing new ideas to the region. Technological changes and the rise of agricultural societies and “scientific farming” also played a part. The period saw an increased dependence on farm animals and cultivation of multiple crops; refinements to farm structures naturally followed. While the classic New World Dutch farmstead typically counted only a large barn and one or more hay barracks and perhaps a summer kitchen among its outbuildings, additional structures, such as corn cribs, wagon houses, blacksmith shops, etc., were added to older farmsteads as agricultural practices changed.

In the parts of New York State that were just opening to farming in the post-Revolutionary years, new inhabitants typically brought along the building forms and framing strategies that were familiar to them. In New York, most of these new farmers were recent transplants from New England, and so it’s no surprise that their houses, barns, outbuildings, and land-use patterns typically mimic those which were familiar to them in their former homeland. In areas where the New World Dutch cultural hearth was well established, these new transplants frequently utilized a mixture of forms and building techniques, combining local traditions they were newly encountering with approaches that they brought with them. The degree to which this creolization occurred was dependent upon the owner (their personal preferences, sometimes influenced by the degree to which they were socially connected to the local community), the type of farming they were undertaking, and who they chose as a carpenter/joiner. In the New World Dutch cultural hearth, this phenomena most frequently occurred in the border counties along the east bank of the Hudson River. It also occurred in western New York, where families from the Hudson Valley and New England comingled in areas that were only opened to European-American occupation after the Revolution.

Similarly, when adapting their established farmsteads to new modes of farming, Euro-American natives of the Hudson Valley sometimes embraced building types not previously familiar to them, having been exposed to these forms through neighbors or newly-available agricultural publications. Single aisle barns appear to be a response by joiners trained in New World Dutch framing traditions to the need to create a mid-sized outbuilding. The frame of this building type is related to both house and barn frames that were already common in the area, and the resulting structures appear to have been put to many different uses.

Some examples, such as the Cornell barn, on today's tour, and the Cartin barn, conflated multiple uses into one building. The Gibbs barn, for example, contains a hay loft, horse barn and granary within a single structure measuring 21 by 28 feet.



Figure 1. The Cartin barn. A small granary is located in the leanto, built at the same time as the rest of the building (photo by W. Wheeler, 2013).

Late 18th and early 19th century real estate advertisements include references to these multi-valent buildings.

FOR SALE,

That very valuable Farm

lying in the town of Pittstown, pleasantly situated along the Bank of Hootick-river about 25 miles from Albany, 15 from Lansingburgh and 7 east of Schaghticock--containing upwards of 400 acres---60 or 70 are of the first quality of low or interval land, fit for plow or meadow, and 350 of upland of a good kind, warm soil, fit for grass or grain, and very free of stone.---The low land, and about 250 acres of the upland is under good improvement, the residue is well timbered, with white-pine, oak, beach, ash, bass and maple.---There is on the premises, one new English barn, 60 feet by 40, with a horse stable under one end, one cow house 75 feet long; one waggon house, and corn grainery 42 feet by 21 four framed dwelling houses, and pot-ash works, all in excellent order. ALSO the one half of a new grist-mill, standing on the said premises, calculated either for country or merchant work. There is now in it three run of stones, with bolts and apparatus necessary for manufacturing of flour, and convenience for another run of stones if required. ALSO one half of a new Dutch and English saw-mill, that cuts about 4000 logs per year.--It is a delightful situation, in the heart of a well fertilized country, and a commodious stand either for a store or tavern---The main road that leads from Washington County to the New City passes along this farm.---For further particulars apply to the subscriber, at the Parroon's mills, in Water-vliet, where they may see a map of the premises, with all the public roads, highways and towns that lay adjacent thereto---considerable abatement will be made if the whole of the purchase money is paid down, and possession will be given immediately. THOMAS L. WITBEEK.
August 2d, 1795. 16cp

Valuable Lands, &c.

FOR SALE, Spring-Hill Farm,

ON which the subscriber lately resided, situate in Greenbush, one mile east of the Albany ferry, containing 242 acres of the best of land: It commands a beautiful prospect of the city and river. There is on it a good dwelling, carriage house and granary, 21 by 23 feet, well finished and painted; a new barn, 52 by 56 feet; three hay barracks and out houses, all new and in complete order; a beautiful garden stocked with the best fruit trees from Prince's nursery, inclosed in a new pale fence painted white; a good proportion of arable and meadow land, sufficient to cut 100 tons of hay; from three to six hundred bushels of wheat has been raised annually for the last four years; about 100 acres of mostly hard wood l. &c---the whole in good fence, a considerable proportion of which are of new chestnut rails, and every lot is well watered. There is also on the premises an inexhaustible quarry of smooth faced building stone, which from its contiguity to the city of Albany makes it an object worthy of attention.

ALSO, FOR SALE,

That beautiful Situation,

lately occupied by General H. K. VAN RENSSELAER, containing about 50 acres of Land, two miles below the ferry, on the east bank of the river and in sight of the city. The house is spacious, having four rooms on a floor, with the necessary out-buildings. This would be a pleasant summer's retreat for a gentleman, or eligible for the man who wishes to retire from business---Or it will be let, and possession given immediately. Apply to
SOLOMON VAN RENSSELAER.
April 29, 1805. 23cp

Figure 2. Two newspaper articles, indicating the early and common presence of combination barns in Rensselaer County. Both of these notices include reference to combination wagon or carriage houses and corn cribs.

Bracketing today's tour, the Historic Barns of Nipmose and the Moseley barn are both sites of fascinating early barns, which while not strictly New World Dutch in form, represent interesting amalgams of multiple regional types.

1. Historic Barns of Nipmoose, 59 Sherman Lane, Buskirk

The three restored barns at Nipmoose share a landscape with the New World Dutch-framed Clapp house. The following history and context comes from the farm's website (<http://nipmoosebarns.org/farm-barn-history/>)

Owner History

According to the earliest records, the Nipmoose Farm was sold by Ebenezer Darling to Abram Viele in 1799. Soon thereafter the farm was purchased by Barnabus Clapp who held title to it for over 40 years.

By the late 1800s, the Shermans had settled on the farm. The Sherman family lived there continuously for a century. The roadway leading to the farm is named after the Shermans.

The Nipmoose Farm was first established as a subsistence farm. Timber was cut, fields were cleared, and structures built. Farm animals, vegetables and crops would have been just sufficient in numbers to sustain the family. Subsequently, crops were cultivated and livestock raised for sale, as a principal source of income.

By the early 1900s, the farm had been transformed into a dairy farm, as was typical of other farmsteads in the region.

The Farm's Buildings

The numerous buildings, which can be seen in the 1960s aerial photograph above, are witness to the evolution of the farm. A host of structures can be seen that once supported an assortment of agricultural endeavors. While no records have yet been discovered which verify when the barns and house were first built, some information can be gleaned from the buildings which are still extant.

Both the Scottish and the German barns reveal evidence of having been moved. It remains a mystery as to whether they were transported from miles away or simply relocated on the farm. Their dates of construction (Scottish Barn 18th century, German Barn 19th century) differ vastly as well as their building styles. But they both were re-built to support new initiatives on the Nipmoose Farm.

The Scottish Barn would have served as a thrashing barn, providing storage for crops. There was room as well for six milk cows. The German Barn was altered, after it was moved, to provide space for a dairy herd of about thirty cows.

The modest story and a half farmhouse was built circa 1800. Since the farm was established prior to that date, the house must have replaced an earlier dwelling.

Long term plans of The Persistence Foundation (TPF) include restoration of the farmhouse.

When TPF first purchased the farm in 2000, several structures were still extant. All of them, however, were in very poor condition. Because of the historic integrity and unique qualities of the Scottish and German barns, they were singled out for restoration.

The Corn Crib, another significant historic building, was located on a nearby farm. The Hadley family donated it to TPF. The Corn Crib (built circa 1820) was then disassembled and brought to the Nipmoose Farm in 2002, where it was restored and resurrected.

The Workshop Barn was built by TPF to facilitate the restoration work on the three barns. It has been used for carpentry, timber framing and repairs, and most recently, as a space for caterers when servicing events.

One could argue that the “German barn” represents a variant on the single-aisle New World Dutch barn, albeit with distinctive New England features as well.



Figure 3. The Clapp house at Nip Moose (photo by W. Wheeler, 2012).



Figure 6. The Cornell barn. A roughly 4'-6" wide corn crib is located on the south side of the second level of this combination barn (photo by W. Wheeler, 2012).

3. George Peck Farm, 204 Abbott Rd, Buskirk

This small barn, 18 by 22 feet overall, with an early 10 foot deep addition to the rear, features ten H-bents. The bents in this barn are spaced between 2'-10 and 4'-3" apart, suggesting that the building was intended to carry substantial weight at its second floor level. Some of the anchorbeam posts have marks indicating that lath and plaster was once attached to them.



Figure 7. The Peck barn (photo by W. Wheeler, 2010).



Figure 8. The closely-spaced bents of the Peck barn (photo by W. Wheeler, 2010).

4. Annette and Jippe Hiemstra, 345 Nickmush Rd, Buskirk—The former Gibbs barn, relocated to the Hiemstra property.



Figure 9. Gibbs barn, before disassembly (photo by Connie Kheel, 2012). The leanto appears to have been original, or a very early addition to the building.



Figure 10. The Gibbs barn in the process of being disassembled (photo by Connie Kheel, 2012).

The Gibbs barn is a small structure—18'-1" wide and just over 21 feet long—with seven closely-spaced anchorbeams. The anchorbeams of the barn are of similarly diminutive size, typically measuring between 7 and 9 inches high and between 6 and 8 inches wide, indicating a probable construction date in the early 19th century. The wood used in the frame includes oak/chestnut and pine or hemlock. The side walls of the barn stand about 12'-3" high, with the top of the anchorbeams at about 6'-10" from the ground surface. The paired rafters are 5" x 4 ½" or so in size, and are pegged where they join at the apex of the roof. The spacing of the bents—generally about 3'-4" on center—and the size and scale of the remaining elements used in the frame, are all typical of dwellings built in the late 18th or early 19th century. It is clear, however, that the Gibbs barn frame was not originally intended to be used for a house; its lack of finish and absence of witness marks for the attachment of lath demonstrate that it was not used for that purpose.

5. Moseley Barn, 709 Nickmush Rd, Buskirk

Not much is presently known about the Moseley barn. It appears to have been constructed in the late 18th or early 19th century. The barn measures 28 by 40 and is, at its core, a three-bay threshing barn.

(over)



Figure 11. The Moseley barn (photo by Connie Kheel, 2016).



Figure 12. Interior of the Moseley barn, showing bents (photo by Connie Kheel, 2016).

W. R. Wheeler
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